

IN THE CLAIMS

Claim 1 (currently amended): In a guarded surgical scalpel, wherein a blade is mounted on a cleat on the scalpel, wherein a guard is moved rearwardly on the scalpel to expose the blade, and forwardly on the scalpel to cover the blade, the guard having two detented positions on the scalpel defined by a detent pin carried by a depressible top button on a cantilevered spring arm, the detent pin being received alternately in one of two detent pockets formed on the scalpel, wherein a blade stripper is thereafter moved forwardly and longitudinally of the scalpel to engage the rear portion of the blade and deflect the rear portion of the blade away from the cleat on the scalpel, and wherein the guard is then moved forwardly on the scalpel to strip the blade of the cleat and thus remove the blade from the scalpel, an improvement comprising a manually-releasable lock on the blade stripper to prevent an accidental or inadvertent stripping of the blade off the scalpel, thereby requiring a two-hand operation and preventing an accidental or inadvertent stripping of the blade during a surgical procedure, the manually-releasable lock comprising a locking stud carried by the depressible top button oppositely from the detent pin, and a hook on the blade stripper for receiving the locking stud, the locking stud being independent of the detent pin and the two detent pockets formed on the scalpel.

Claim 2: Cancelled

Claim 3 (currently amended): The improvement of ~~claim 2~~ claim 1 wherein the guard and the blade stripper move longitudinally of the scalpel, respectively, and wherein the locking stud is disposed transversely to the respective longitudinal movement of the guard and blade stripper; and wherein the blade stripper is movable independently of the guard.

Claim 4: Cancelled

Claim 5: Cancelled

Claim 6: Cancelled

Claim 7 (original): The improvement of claim 1, wherein the blade stripper has a forward edge which is beveled and includes an incline, and wherein the beveled forward edge slides under the rear portion of the blade and cams the blade away from the cleat on the scalpel to eject the blade as the rear portion of the blade rides up the incline on the beveled forward edge of the blade stripper.

Claim 8 (currently amended): The improvement of claim ~~claim 6~~ claim 7, wherein the forward edge of the blade stripper comprises a compound beveled forward edge.

Claim 9 (previously amended): In a guarded surgical scalpel, wherein a blade is mounted on a cleat on the main body portion of the scalpel, wherein a guard is moved rearwardly on the main body portion of the scalpel to expose the blade, wherein a blade stripper is moved forwardly to engage the rear portion of the blade and deflect the rear portion of the blade away from the cleat on the scalpel, and wherein the guard is then moved forwardly on the scalpel to strip the blade off the cleat and thus remove the blade from the scalpel, the guard and the blade stripper moving longitudinally of the scalpel, an improvement comprising a manually-releasable blade stripper lock to prevent an accidental or inadvertent stripping of the blade off the scalpel, the blade stripper lock including a depressible top button, the depressible top button carrying a locking stud disposed transversely of the longitudinal sliding movement of the guard, the depressible top button being formed on a leaf spring that is pivotably disposed within the main body portion of the scalpel, a hook blade stripper receiving the locking stud, wherein the depressible top button also carries a transverse detent pin, wherein the guard has a closed slot within which the detent pin slides, and wherein the closed slot has a pair of detent pockets, on at each end thereof for receiving the detent pin, thereby providing a two-position manually-

releasable detented position of the guard, and thereby precluding complete removal of the guard off the scalpel, wherein the respective detent pin and locking stud on the depressible top button are disposed oppositely of each other, and wherein the blade stripper has a forward edge which is beveled and includes an incline, and wherein the beveled forward edge slides under the rear portion of the blade and cams the blade away from the cleat on the scalpel to position the blade for ejection as the rear portion of the blade rides up the incline on the beveled forward edge of the blade stripper, and hereafter the guard is moved forward to eject the blade; and wherein the blade stripper is movable independently of the guard.

Claim 10 (currently amended): In combination, a guarded surgical scalpel having a guard and a blade stripper movable independently of the guard, and a blade stripper lock requiring a two-hand operation to prevent inadvertent or accidental movement of the blade stripper during normal use or handling of the guarded surgical scalpel, wherein the guarded surgical scalpel includes a handle and further includes a guard adapted for longitudinal sliding movement thereon, and wherein the blade stripper lock comprises a button on the guard of the scalpel, the button carrying a locking stud disposed transversely of the longitudinal sliding movement of the guard, and a hook on the blade stripper to receive the locking stud.

Claim 11: Cancelled

Claim 12 (currently amended): The combination of ~~claim 11~~, claim 10, wherein the button on the scalpel comprises a depressible top button.

Claim 13 (original): The combination of claim 12, wherein the depressible top button is carried by a leaf spring on the handle of the scalpel.

Claim 14: (Cancelled).

Claim 15: (Cancelled).

Claim 16 (currently amended): A method of using a blade stripper in a guarded surgical scalpel, wherein the scalpel carries a blade mounted forwardly thereon, and wherein the scalpel is provided with a guard and is further provided with a blade stripper comprising the steps of providing a lock-off on the blade stripper, thereby precluding an inadvertent or accidental movement of the blade stripper during use or handling of the guarded surgical scalpel, retracting the guard on the scalpel, disabling the blade stripper lock-off, advancing the blade stripper forwardly of the scalpel to engage the rearward portion of the blade and position the rearward portion of the blade for subsequent engagement by the guard, and advancing the guard forwardly of the scalpel to engage the positioned rearward portion of the blade and eject the blade from the scalpel, thereby requiring a two-hand operation, and wherein the blade stripper lock-off comprises a locking stud on a depressible top button formed on a leaf spring portion of the scalpel, and wherein the blade stripper has a hook receiving the locking stud on the depressible top button.